

Democratic legislators cry foul over McCleary funding plan

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State Democratic lawmakers complained as their GOP colleagues passed an amended K-12 funding plan out of a Senate committee.

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By [Joseph O'Sullivan](#)

Seattle Times Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — Saying the GOP has badly weakened a strategy to tackle the state Supreme Court's education-funding order, Democratic legislators cried foul Thursday about an amended K-12 plan approved by a Senate committee.

The acrimony came over the modest plan-for-a-plan lawmakers put together this year to address the court's contempt order for not fully satisfying its 2012 McCleary ruling.

Since August, the court [has imposed fines of \\$100,000-per-day](#) for lawmakers' failure to provide a full funding plan for the McCleary decision, which said legislators were underfunding the state's public schools.

But in a Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee, Democrats decried changes made and then approved along party lines by Republican senators to the plan that had emerged from a bipartisan work group convened by Gov. Jay Inslee.

In committee debate, Democratic Floor Leader Sen. Christine Rolfes of Bainbridge Island criticized the amended plan, saying it "makes zero commitment to ... increased state funding for the public schools, at all."

Sen. Joe Fain, R-Auburn, downplayed the amendments, saying, "the changes are quite negligible" and dismissed the notion that the bipartisan work group should have the final word.

“There’s no reason that we should ever think that a roomful of two or three or four legislators should ever be able to, you know, force the entire Legislature to take something without conversation and amendment,” Fain said.

The plan — introduced in the House and Senate with sponsors from both parties — would establish an education-funding task force and calls for analysis of how school districts pay for teacher salaries.

The plan doesn’t spell out how to end the school districts’ overreliance on local property-tax levies [to pay for teachers and basic education needs](#), which is part of the McCleary order.

Instead, the plan calls for action by the end of the 2017 legislative session.

Thursday’s amended Senate version, [Senate Bill 6195](#), pushed that date back to 2018 and, Democrats say, weakened the language specifying what exactly needs to be done by then.

Legislative leaders and Gov. Jay Inslee have said this year’s 60-day legislative session will not produce a full McCleary funding plan.

Crafting such a plan is expected to require compromise over the complex and politically tricky task of changing how school districts [use local property tax levies](#) to fund education.

Information from The Seattle Times archives is included in this report. Joseph O'Sullivan: 360-236-8268 or josullivan@seattletimes.com. On Twitter [@OlympiaJoe](#)